Mortuary owners to stand trial

PASADENA, Calif. (AP) — Three people have been ordered to trial on charges of prying gold teeth from corpses, selling body parts for research, and commingling the remains of up to 15 people for cremation at a family-run funeral home.

Jerry Wayne Sconce, 54, his wife, Laurieanne Lamb Sconce, 51, and their son David Wayne Sconce, 32, will be arraigned May 24 in Superior Court on 67 felony and misdemeanor counts. The three pleaded innocent in Municipal Court proceedings.

The ruling by Muncipal Court Judge Victor Person followed a nine-month preliminary hearing in which nearly 100 people testified.

Following the ruling, Deputy District Attorney Walter H. Lewis said that in 20 years of public work, "I had never seen any case remotely resembling this case."

Prosecutors contend that between September 1985 and December 1986 the Sconces removed various body parts from the corpses brought to the Lamb Funeral Home in Pasadena without consent of next of kin and sold the parts for at least $20,000.

The Sconces also are accused of plucking gold teeth from the mouths of corpses — in one case using a crowbar to break a corpse's jaw to get at the gold. The family also cremated more than one body at a time, prosecutors alleged.

State law requires bodies to be cremated separately.

The investigation into the Lamb Funeral Home of Pasadena began in January 1987 after San Bernardino County officials found several hundred pounds of human remains at the Oscar Ceramics plant in the Mojave Desert community of Hesperia.

Investigators said David Sconce allegedly used the ceramic ovens to burn corpses after fire destroyed his family's Pasadena Crematorium in Altadena.

David Sconce also faces charges that he unsuccessfully solicited the murder of his grandparents so his mother could inherit the funeral home. He was later charged with trying to arrange the murder of Deputy District Attorney Walter H. Lewis, whom Sconce blamed for the trauma his family suffered.

Jerry and Laurieanne Sconce also are accused of stealing about $100,000 in interest from accounts established by customers paying funeral expenses in advance. They allegedly forged family members' signatures on donor forms and falsified records to reflect a different location for cremation, prosecutors said.

Jerry and Laurieanne Sconce are free on $5,000 bail, while David Sconce is being held without bail.

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